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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9105
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3028
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2100
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2944
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0812
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6543
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4456
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000620

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: CLAYMORE MINES AND MOB VIOLENCE AS LTTE
ALL BUT JETTISONS GENEVA TALKS

REF: A. COLOMBO 613

- [1](#)B. COLOMBO 601
- [1](#)C. COLOMBO 592
- [1](#)D. COLOMBO 591

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. 1.4(b,d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Violence and communal strife in the north and east continued over the long New Year holiday, killing at least another 40 people April 13-17 in Trincomalee, Jaffna and Vavuniya. An April 12 bomb blast in Trincomalee that appeared to target civilians--the first such incident since the 2002 truce--was followed up by ethnically targeted arson attacks against local Tamils--another distressing first in the four-year-old ceasefire. Hope that a second round of ceasefire talks, rescheduled for April 24-25 in Geneva, might help mitigate tensions was extinguished when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Peace Secretariat announced late April 16 that the Tigers would not participate unless "obstacles" are removed, blaming their decision on the Government's alleged failure to ensure the safe passage of rebel commanders from the east to the north. The alarmingly rapid descent back toward communal violence plays all too well into Tiger plans to seek any pretext to spurn dialogue. The Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) will need to work hard to avoid a spread of communal violence. End Summary.

Sticks, Stones, Claymores, and Conflagrations

[1](#)2. (SBU) Almost 70 people have been killed in Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)-set claymore explosions and bomb blasts, and in retaliatory attacks by anti-LTTE elements,

and, even more regrettably, anti-Tamil mobs over the past 10 days. In the aftermath of a suspected LTTE bombing of a vegetable market in Trincomalee on April 12 (Ref B)--the first time an LTTE attack appears to have been calculated to cause mass civilian casualties since the 2002 ceasefire--a Sinhalese mob set fire to several Tamil-owned homes and businesses in the vicinity. Immediately upon hearing of the April 12 explosion, the GSL dispatched a senior minister and the Inspector General of Police to try to calm the situation.

Unfortunately, that was not sufficient. After a one-day respite on the April 13 Sinhalese New Year, the violence resumed, beginning with the April 14 murder of a young Sinhalese civilian in Trincomalee. Sinhalese mobs set fire to over 50 Tamil homes and murdered several civilians, including an Indian citizen and the female custodian of a Hindu temple, in ethnically targeted attacks. In all, 20 civilians were killed in mob-instigated violence in Trincomalee between April 12 and 14, while an estimated 1,000 Tamils have fled their homes in the district since the violence began. An uneasy quiet returned to Trincomalee on April 17, where a dusk-to-dawn curfew has remained in effect since April 12.

13. (SBU) The LTTE continued its campaign of violence against the security forces on April 14 when a command-detonated claymore mine attached to a bus carrying Sri Lanka Army (SLA) personnel exploded in Trincomalee, injuring two. On April 15 a similar blast in Trincomalee killed two Sri Lanka Air Force personnel, while a separate but similar incident killed five SLA soldiers in the northern district of Vavuniya. On Easter Sunday an SLA soldier was killed in a blast in Jaffna; a civilian standing in the vicinity was wounded and died the following day. On April 17

COLOMBO 00000620 002 OF 003

seven SLA soldiers died when a claymore mine attached to a three-wheel auto rickshaw exploded in Vavuniya, while two airmen were injured in a blast in the eastern district of Batticaloa the same day.

Those Aren't OUR Claymores!

14. (C) On April 16 the pro-LTTE website TamilNet claimed that the claymore attacks on the security forces were the work of the previously unknown "Upsurging People's Force," purportedly not connected with the Tigers. The LTTE-proxy Tamil National Alliance (TNA) issued a press release on April 13 accusing the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) of "terrorizing the Tamil-speaking people into fleeing the Trincomalee District with the intention of ethnically cleansing the district of Tamils." An April 14 statement from the LTTE accused the government of instigating the mob violence against Tamils in Trincomalee, one of the few areas in the country (outside Colombo) in which significant populations of Sinhalese, Muslims, and Tamils coexist. Dr. Jehan Perera, Director of the National Peace Council, commented to poloff on April 17, "The situation is getting serious because of the riots and the lack of action by the military, and (the view that) the military assisted those who had been rioting. This is a mini-1983 (when GSL-backed mobs attacked and killed Tamils living in Colombo) from the Tamil point of view."

Tigers "Saddened" by Change in Travel Plans

15. (SBU) On April 16, LTTE political wing leader S. Tamilselvan said in a letter to Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar the LTTE would not participate in a second round of talks in Geneva, already postponed from April 19-20 to April 24-25, due to transportation security concerns, unless "obstacles" could be removed. Playing the victim, the Tiger leader claimed to be "saddened" by being unable to attend the

Geneva peace talks because the government "blocked" LTTE requests to transport its eastern cadres to Tiger headquarters in the north for a pre-Geneva huddle and "disrupted" plans for sea travel arranged by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) to bring eastern commanders to the north. Members of the SLMM had been scheduled to escort Tiger leaders by sea to the north on April 15, but the LTTE canceled the trip at the last minute, claiming Sri Lanka Navy patrol boats planned to follow the travelers too closely. Tamilselvan accused the GSL of being "bent on stopping us from attending the next Geneva talks."

¶6. (SBU) The SLMM, which thought it had the Tigers' agreement to use a civilian ferry to transport its cadres, was caught off guard by the Tigers' surprise refusal, and the Nordic monitors are clearly finding the Tigers' intransigence increasingly frustrating. SLMM Spokeswoman Helen Olafsdottir told BBC yesterday the LTTE had agreed to the Sri Lankan naval escort: "It was part of the agreement. (The LTTE) should have read the clauses carefully."

Comment

¶7. (C) Comment: With the mounting bloodshed, it is easy to forget that, up until a day ago, hope remained that the two parties could still meet next week across the table in Geneva to find ways to prop up the disintegrating Ceasefire Agreement. That is now unlikely to happen. The Tigers'

COLOMBO 00000620 003 OF 003

sustained attacks on the security forces, their disturbing return to violence targeting civilians, and their all-too-obvious willingness to seize on any pretext to call off the talks make "Geneva II" increasingly unlikely. The LTTE's ready resort to violence is not surprising, given its habitual ruthlessness and cynical disregard for human suffering. More chilling is the return of Sinhalese mob violence against innocent Tamil civilians. The Government must work quickly to quell communal tensions, or risk seeing the violence spiral well beyond its control.
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